



# Guidance Policy:

## Students with Disabilities Participating in Virtual High School

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**Introduction:**

Students with disabilities are ensured the same rights to access the South Dakota Virtual High School as their district peers. This document will help districts become familiar with some additional considerations and steps that need to be taken to ensure equitable access. General questions regarding the Virtual High School program, courses offered, and policy agreements can be found on the web at: <http://www.sdvhs.k12.sd.us/> or questions can be directed to the Office of Accreditation and Certification at 773-3134. Questions regarding specific issues in regards to students with disabilities can be directed to the Office of Special Education Programs at 773-3678.

**Registering students:**

Authorized school personnel coordinate registration. If a student with disabilities is considering taking an online course the feasibility, planning and logistics should be discussed with the IEP team prior to registration. The authorized school personnel registering students should verify a student's special education status and involvement of the IEP team prior to registering students in Virtual High School. This is important in order to ensure student success.

Although distance education is available to all students, any student can be refused registration into distance education at the discretion of the district. It may be appropriate to deny registration if the district determines the student's needs cannot be fully met through the Virtual High School course. A student may also be denied if the district feels the student does not possess the skills necessary to be successful in online learning.

**Accessibility Issues:**

Federal law and state policy requires Virtual High Schools to make their programs and services available to all students, including students with disabilities. Online technologies can make many more resources and educational opportunities available to students who would not otherwise be able to participate. These same technologies can also pose other limitations to overcome.

Although Virtual High School providers sign a policy agreement to ensure courses are accessible and accommodations will be provided, it is ultimately the district's responsibility to ensure the course is able to meet the needs of the student. If it does not, the district should work with the provider and instructor to determine the best way to provide services to the student or determine if the course will not meet the student's needs and another alternative should be sought.

**Providing Accommodations and Modifications:**

There are no specific accommodations or modifications that are not allowed for online education, there are responsibilities for all parties to ensure the student receives the appropriate accommodations and modifications. The district is

responsible to clearly convey the student's accommodations and modifications and ensure the program will meet the student's needs. The provider is required to assure that courses will be able to meet the needs of students and the instructors must agree to the provider's assurances.

The student's accommodations and modifications in the IEP need to be conveyed to the distance instructor and the team should ensure that they will be provided. In addition to the accommodations and modification listed on the student's IEP, it is important to consider four key areas in regards to the needs of students taking distance education courses in order to determine if additional accommodations are warranted.

1. Course accommodations. These services include changes to the course that did not affect the course content. The most common type of accommodation involved extended time in the form of one or more extensions to the time for completing the course. This category also included alternative formats for course materials (e.g., electronic file of text material, transcript for audiotaped materials).

2. Exam accommodations. This type of service includes time accommodations for examinations such as additional time for the examination, deferrals, or break times during examinations. It also includes assistance with presenting the questions and recording the student's response, for example, through the use of a reader or scribe or by printing the examination in a large-size font. Other examination accommodations include environmental changes (e.g., providing an especially distraction-free room, playing relaxing music). Still other accommodations involve format changes requiring content expertise (e.g., multiple-choice to short-answer questions, oral examination).

3. External support services. The use of a special content assistance, or educational aide (e.g., note-taker, interpreter) are included in this category. This category primarily involves district personnel.

4. Assistive technology. This type of service involves assessment of student needs for adaptive equipment or technology, procuring equipment, and organizing training. Common types of assistive technology included the use of text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and screen reader software, as well as specially set-up computers to accommodate difficulties such as low vision, fine motor limitations (e.g., hand tremors), and dexterity problems.

### **Considering Least Restrictive Environment:**

Courses taken through the Virtual High School should be considered as courses taken with non-disabled peers, unless the course is specifically designed for only special education students.

If the course does not have a clear time period, the IEP team should use the time period of a similar face-to-face course in order to determine the amount of hours in calculating least restrictive environment.

**Communicating with Virtual High School Staff:**

Contact information is provided to the student that would allow the teacher to communicate with the online instructor.

**Progress Reports:**

Students participating in Virtual High School courses should receive progress reports towards their IEP goals at the end of each of the district's reporting periods (typically every nine weeks).